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In the Matter of Policies and Rules Concerning Children's  
Television Programming; Revision of Programming Policies for  
Television Broadcast Stations. Before the Federal Communications  
Commission MM Docket No. 93-49

study were contacted to see if they were still producing original children's programs. In August, 1991 a brief mail survey was sent to 170 public broadcasting stations listed in the 1989 Broadcasting/Cablecasting Yearbook to ascertain the extent of original programming for children among public broadcasters. One hundred and twenty two stations returned the questionnaire and the 33 stations which reported producing original programs for children were then further queried by mail in Spring 1992.

Here we will consider the commercial broadcasters data only. The questionnaires and interviews with commercial broadcasters was intended to ascertain the extent of children's programming locally produced, the station ownership structure associated with local children's television production (i.e., independent, network owned and operated or network affiliated); information about the locally produced children's programming such as format and target age group and further information about factors which seemed to lead to a station's commitment to the production of original children's programming.

### Findings.

Since our research was designed to replicate the 1960 TIO study it would be useful to provide some basic information about that study as a point of comparison with our data. The TIO study was a survey of all 550 commercial and noncommercial television stations in the US. Only 223 (47% response rate) stations returned the mail questionnaire providing information on 425 programs designed specifically for children (these programs excluded the production of programming designed for in-school use).

In 1989, we sent questionnaires to 956 commercial stations and received responses from 506 for a response of 53%. Whereas 223 stations in 1960 reported locally originated programs for children (or 88% of all stations responding to the survey or 41% of the 550 commercial and noncommercial stations in the country at the time of the survey) only 108 commercial television stations reported locally originated children's television programs in 1989. Thus, in 1989 only 21% of the stations in our sample of 506 stations reported the original production of children's television programs at their stations. At these local stations, 142 different locally originated children's television shows were identified.

It should be pointed out that the 1989 survey did identify a much larger number of children's programs broadcast by the local stations. In fact 4,962 children's programs were listed by our

the number of local originated children's productions between 1960 and 1989. In short, in our survey of 1989, we found a scarcity of locally originated children's television productions.

What types of stations, network O and O's, network affiliated or independent stations, were most likely to produce original children's programs? Of the 108 commercial stations who reported producing original children's programming, 5 percent were network owned and operated, 65 percent were network affiliated and only 30 percent were independent stations. These percentages closely approximate the structure of the television industry (according to Head and Sterling's 1989 edition of Broadcasting in America 2 percent of all commercial stations were network owned and operated in 1989; 58% were network affiliated and 40 percent were independent). Thus, it would appear that while network affiliated stations in our sample are the most likely group to produce original children's programs, industry structure and station association does not appear to influence a station's inclination to produce local programs.

We also queried the commercial stations to find out more about these locally produced children's programs. Of the 142 locally produced original programs, 58% of 82 programs were regularly scheduled shows (either daily, weekly or monthly), the remainder were special broadcasts either one time only programs (15% or 11 shows) part of a special or annual series such as a Christmas special (28% or 19 programs) or part of a community campaign (17% or 12 shows).

Further analysis was made of the regularly scheduled children's programs (n=82 shows). Of these 82 shows, five had been in production since the 1950s with 1955 the earliest date; 12 of the programs began production in the 1960s, eight began production in the 1970s and 50 shows began production in the 1980s.

The stations were asked whether the production format of these shows included live action, animation, puppets or marionettes and were told they could check all that applied. Seventy two percent (or 59 of the programs) reported the use of live action in the shows and 32% (or 26 shows) reported using puppets or marionettes. Only 23% or 19 programs reported using animation. All five of the programs in production since the 1950s were live action. And the stations reported that children were involved (as hosts, participants, studio audiences) in 80 percent of the programs. Of the 60 programs which answered the question about the target age group for the shows, 34 % of the programs claimed a minimum target age for the show between two and five years of age and 23% of the programs listed the minimum target age of the show as age 6. Thirty five percent of the shows offered a maximum target age of 12 years. Clearly, the most frequent target age groups was 6 to 12 year olds. Furthermore, 56 programs were reported to utilize special expert outside consultants (such as educators, medical

doctors or psychologists) with programs which originated in the 1980s most likely to do so (35 programs beginning in the 1980s had such consultants while none of the five shows which had been on the air since the 1950s had such consultants).

While the various programming concepts represented in these 82 regularly scheduled shows will not be detailed here, there was a wide range of programming types, from traditional 1950s programs involving a studio audience of children who watch cartoons and engage in interviews with the host, locally produced children's news programs (six programs were identified in this category) , and more recently the introduction of children's shows associated with local children's clubs. Often these kids clubs are described as short breaks during an afternoon programing session where young actors introduce what is happening around town or wish Happy Birthdays. We have not analyzed the decriptions of the programs for educational content per se however. Howev er, our reading of the descriptions of the programs from the questionnaires suggest that the vast majority of the shows are not what we would conisder informational or educational programming based on the 1990 Act's intent.

In the summer of 1991 phone surveys were conducted with personnel at 32 stations which had been idenfitted as producing original children's shows in the 1980 survey. Intertastingly by

well on the station's image, and is the result of a commitment to such programming by a member of the station's staff who typically becomes a champion for such programming. On the other hand, personnel at the 13 stations which had dropped local origination children's shows between our mail survey in 1989 and the phone survey in 1991 most often cited funding problems as reasons for dropping these shows.

### Conclusions.

In conclusion, the result of our researches into locally originated children's television productions suggest that first there is a scarcity of such programs in the current marketplace. In our 1989 survey we found only 108 stations producing original children's shows. Furthermore, there is very little evidence from this research of the sort of educational or informational programming intended in the 1990 Children's Television Act. Lastly, while funding problems are often cited as the cause for cancelling locally produced children's programs, the reasons cited by personnel at those stations producing such shows whom we queried suggest that only when the station personnel perceive such programming as part of their commitment to their community are they most likely to engage in such programming initiatives.

Also, from reading our questionnaire descriptions of the